Conjunctions

(a form of sentence glue)
Conjunctions are joining words.

They join words to form phrases and join phrases to form clauses.

They also join clauses to each other to form compound and complex sentences.

Within sentences, there are three types of conjunction: coordinating, subordinating and correlative.
There are seven **coordinating** conjunctions:

- and
- but
- for
- nor
- or
- so
- yet

A simple way to remember these is to rearrange their order so that their first letters form a word in their own right: **For,and,nor,but,or,yet,so** – Fanboys. (It may be odd, but it’s memorable.)
Coordinating conjunctions help writers to organise words into meaningful phrases that can then be arranged to create larger units of meaning such as clauses and sentences.
Examples of coordinating conjunctions in use

For example:

- salt **and** pepper (two nouns joined by ‘and’ to make a phrase)
- garlic, pepper, vinegar, lemon juice **and** olive oil (a group of words in the form of a list with the last item joined to it by ‘and’)
- garlic, pepper, vinegar, lemon juice **but** no olive oil (a group of words in the form of a list with the last item joined to it by ‘but’)

**Salt and pepper are common spices** – an independent clause (a complete idea) which could be a simple sentence or part of a larger sentence.

**Salt and pepper are common spices, but excessive use of them can be bad for you** – two independent clauses joined together by ‘but’ to form a new (compound) sentence.

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Coordinating conjunctions - punctuation

Whenever two independent clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction, you must place a comma at the end of the first independent clause but before the coordinating conjunction.

Here is an example:
“She wanted to take the dogs for a walk, but couldn’t find their leads.”
• **Subordinating conjunctions** extend your sentence-making creativity by fine-tuning the nature of the relationship between a main clause and a dependent clause. They help your reader to understand that relationship very precisely and clearly. **Therefore, subordinating conjunctions play a very important role in intellectual discussions such as those required by academic assessments.**

• Here are some commonly used subordinating conjunctions:

  after, although, as, because, before, even, if, if only, once, since, than, though, unless, until, when, where, whereas, while
• **Although** the government had been elected for a four-year term, the prime minister decided to hold an early election.

In the sentence above, the **main clause** is ‘the prime minister decided to hold an early election’. The subordinating conjunction – ‘although’ – introduces and qualifies the dependent or **lesser clause**, ‘the government had been elected for a four-year term’.

Think of ‘although’ as putting the initial clause in its lesser place and promoting the second clause as the more important idea!
• **Conjunctive adverbs** (like ‘however’, ‘nevertheless’, ‘whereas’, ‘furthermore’, ‘therefore’ and ‘moreover’) **connect the meanings of adjacent sentences.** This sort of conjunction is termed a conjunctive adverb.

• Conjunctive adverbs are sometimes poorly chosen so that they create confusion instead of clarity. **Make sure that you have chosen the conjunction with the right meaning for your purpose.** For instance, don’t use ‘thus’ unless you are pointing to a cause and effect relationship of some kind.

• **Avoid using conjunctive adverbs as though they were coordinating conjunctions.** This leads to run-on sentences such as, “He knew nothing about poetry, however that didn’t stop him from trying to teach it.”

• Wrongly, some people think that it is incorrect to begin a sentence with a conjunction. On the contrary, as noted above, a **conjunctive adverb is often placed at the beginning of a new sentence to signal a certain relationship between it and the idea of the previous sentence.** (And, of course, subordinating conjunctions begin sentences if the lesser clauses in which they occur happens to come first.)
Correlative conjunctions are pairs of conjunctions that enable you, the writer, to combine sentence phrases into larger sentence units.

The most common correlative conjunctions are:

- both...and
- either...and
- neither...nor
- not...but
- not only...but also
- whether...or
Incorrect: Either you must accept the terms or withdraw from the race.

Correct: You must either accept the terms or withdraw from the race.

What is wrong with the first sentence? **Each term of a pair of correlative conjunctions governs a specific verb.** In the incorrect sentence, ‘Either’ is too far from the verb it governs, ‘accept’. This has been rectified in the correct version, so that it is clear that a choice is being offered between accepting or withdrawing.

- Rule of thumb: keep the correlative conjunction term close to the verb it governs in the sentence.

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References


- Dr Jim Jose, Associate Professor, School of Economics, Politics & Tourism, Faculty of Business & Law, University of Newcastle, for his guidance through my frequent reference to his *Study Skills Online* (2000).


**Recommended source of practice:**